Theatrical Space

James Hamilton

Theoretical literature on theatre offers us two main lines of thought about theatrical space. These are derived from semiotic and from phenomenological analyses of theatrical performance, respectively. Both approaches are motivated in part by the obvious fact that there are theatrical effects associated with such things as the size of performance space, the positions, and changes in position both among performers and between performers and spectators. Each approach seeks to explain the target effects in terms of the background theory each brings to the table. Each approach encounters its own special, and apparently insuperable, difficulties.

Phenomenological approaches correctly appreciate the fact that many of the effects of theatre and of theatrical space in particular are subliminal effects, causally produced and received, so to speak, below the threshold of conscious spectator attention. But these approaches are also committed to the claim that spectators not only always experience an illusion of space in the theatre but also enter into the illusion of space, a different space than the physical space of the theatre.[1] And it is not clear how those spaces are connected, nor is it at all obvious that spectators do enter into such illusions, given that they know they are attending a theatrical performance.

Semiotic approaches correctly reject the claim that all experience of theatre is the experience of illusions, but do so by being committed to the claim that each thing that appears in theatrical space, and theatrical space itself, is always significant, meaningful.[2] But plainly this is not so. Insofar as finding devices to focus spectator attention is central to the performer's craft, not only are many things that appear on stage not meaningful, it would be a theatrical disaster if they were. Given the sheer number of things a spectator could focus on in any finite stretch of time, some things will have to be removed or hidden from focus, and essentially rendered meaningless, in order for a spectator to find meaningful those things she does. Moreover, there are performances in which many things clearly present and in focus for spectators resist semiotic analysis.[3] But most importantly, defenders of phenomenological approaches are right to insist there are effects (and among them

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many spatial effects) that induce reactions among spectators and that are received below the level of grasp of meanings.[4]

A problem common to semiotic and phenomenological approaches to theatre space derives from another, and fundamental, fact about theatrical space itself, namely, that spectators identify what is presented to them as happening in the real physical spaces of theatres. And some effort must be made to analyze this fact and to analyze the connections between that fact and the target theatrical effects with which we are concerned.

I. A new direction

In this essay I sketch out in a new direction on these and related issues.[5] I state and defend a series of claims each of which can be shown to be plausible on its own but when taken together form a coherent structure that provides a new alternative to semiotic and phenomenological approaches to these issues. An important fact is that each of the claims links up with the basic facts that theatrical performances take place in ordinary physical space, and spectators always understand this fact when attending a performance. In the final section, I will argue that this coherent structure provides some additional benefits that are not available from other kinds of theories.

To facilitate the discussion, I will frequently refer to several imagined performances, illustrative of idealized performance kinds.[6] I will use the title *Hedda Gabler* when referring to a traditional narrative performance using Ibsen's script. I will use the title *Gabler at a Distance* to refer to any Brechtian narrative performance using the same script. *Burning Child* will be the title of a Grotowski-style performance that, at least in some attenuated sense, uses Ibsen's script; and, depending on the use to which the script is put, it may or may not have some narrative structure. Finally, *Spontaneous Beauty* will be the title of an imagined narrative performance by Mabou Mines, using only three or four actors, Bunraku puppet techniques, and musicians.[7]

I will assume throughout an idea of "basic comprehension" or "basic understanding" of a theatrical performance. In speaking of *basic* understanding or comprehension, I do not mean getting a full measure of the significance of the performance. Nor do I mean grasping what the performers were aiming at, nor what styles they employed and to what effect. Nor do I mean having a full appreciation of the performance's artistry. Instead, I mean only what it is and what it takes for a single spectator to demonstrate she has grasped the gist of what is presented to her in the performance. Further I will assume the following conditions are adequate for determining when a spectator has basically comprehended a performance:

> A spectator has basic understanding of a theatrical performance if she (1) can describe the object that was presented over the course of the performance, (2) reacts physically in the right ways to what is happening in the performance as those things happen, *or* (3) adopts the moods responsive to what is happening in the performance as those things happen.

This formulation sets forth minimal success conditions for having understood a theatrical performance. That is, anyone who can do (1), or does either (2) or (3) would be said to have understood what she had seen or to understand what she is seeing by all but the least charitable of observers.

II. Physical and affective responses of audiences are non-discursive evidence of understanding.

Although minimal, some may think these success conditions are actually overly generous. Suppose a spectator, let us call him Glenn, comes out of a *Commedia* performance laughing so hard he cannot speak. When asked, Glenn is unable to say what he just saw. Suppose he is never able to reconstruct a story line or to describe anything we would take as showing he had understood the performance. Suppose Glenn not only found the performance funny, he still laughs every time he thinks of it.[8]

Now suppose further we discover in talking to Glenn that he had seen a different theatrical performance only the week before and, although he could tell the story presented in the performance and can do so now, he was then and has ever since remained utterly unmoved by it.

The first case is consistent with success conditions (2) and (3) for basic theatrical comprehension. But just as clearly it is a case in which many of us might hesitate to claim Glenn has understood the performance. In contrast, our second case presents a challenge from another direction because Glenn fails to react in ways that meet conditions (2) or (3). Nevertheless most of us would agree that Glenn had basic comprehension of the second performance.[9]

The problem highlighted by these cases lies with our acceptance of *non-discursive* elements among the success conditions for basic understanding. For what is missing in the first case but is clearly present in the second is *discursive* evidence of comprehension. The ability to describe what one has audited is a cognitive capacity. The reactions and moods a spectator experiences need not be cognitive. If they are not, one wonders why we should think of them as evidence of *understanding* at all.

Moreover, there is a natural causal story to tell about the first case, namely, that Glenn's reactions and moods in that case were *merely* caused. No recognition of

the triggers or even of the fact there are triggers for these reactions and moods was needed in order for them to be induced. Insofar as there is no recognition, there is no cognition, and no understanding either. This suggests it is simply a mistake to take Glenn's reactions and moods as evidence of comprehension; and so we should jettison conditions (2) and (3) altogether.

One reason for resisting this suggestion is that performers count on observing precisely these kinds of reactions in order to gauge how the performance is going and what changes might be need to be made to steer the performance in the right direction.[10] If spectators' reactions and moods are never signs of comprehension then performers are surely mistaken to try to gauge those reactions for the reasons they do. So I wish to insist that physical reactions and adoption of the moods responsive to what has happened during the performance may be reliable evidence of basic understanding of a performance.

Another reason for regarding physical reactions and mood shifts as evidence of cognitive grasp of a performance is seen in the following hypothetical case. Esmerelda leans back in anticipation during *Hedda Gabler* at the moment Hedda crosses the room and pulls the pistol out of its case. Later, Esmerelda is unable to say that, at the time, she thought or feared Hedda was about to commit suicide. She may not even have been aware of leaning back and, being unaware of her own behavior, she may not be able to say why she did it. Don't we still want to treat Esmerelda's reaction as evidence she comprehended what was about to happen?

We do, I think; and so we have to go against some very powerful intuitions if we do not regard reactions and mood shifts as cognitive. We may capture those intuitions by employing some of the machinery of counterfactual conditionals.[11] If a spectator has a certain physical reaction or mood shift at a given moment during a performance, she could have had others at the same time, but did not. Some of those alternative but unrealized physical reactions or mood shifts are consistent with what she would describe were she, or any other basically comprehending spectator, to provide discursive evidence of comprehension. But other reactions and mood shifts are not consistent with such a description. Let us make this idea more precise in the following ways:

- Let "a reaction is consistent with a description" mean that the reaction is one among those reactions that would be appropriate responses to a recognition that could be recorded in a description.
- Let "a reaction is consistent with another reaction" mean that both are within the range of appropriate responses to the same recognition.
- A spectator's reaction is evidence of comprehension if, had she not reacted as she did, she would have reacted in some other way

> consistent with her actual reaction *and* if the set of reactions she would have had is consistent with a correct description of what was presented, whether the relevant description is offered by that spectator or not.

By this means we also can state precisely when a reaction or mood shift is *not* evidence of basic theatrical understanding: either the reaction is not consistent with other ways of reacting that are consistent with a correct description or it belongs to an entire repertoire of reactions that is inconsistent with a correct description.[12]

This account of the role non-discursive reactions play in grasping a performance allows us to demonstrate why Esmerelda's reaction to Hedda's behavior is a sign of comprehending what is about to happen: it is so precisely because her reactions to what is going on at that moment are consistent with all other reactions and mood shifts consistent with any description of Hedda as about to commit suicide, whether or not Esmerelda can provide that description. And this strategy allows us to rekindle our confidence that when Glenn laughed at the *Commedia* performance he really had understood the comedy, even though he could not tell the story he had seen. He laughed because any other reaction he might have had would have been consistent with recognizing what there was to laugh at even though *he* could not describe what that was.

III. The attention of spectators converges upon roughly the same features among the many features performers present to them.

Why is it that spectators usually mention pretty much the same features of what they saw when talking to each other after a performance? To explain this, we must resolve two issues, one about performers and one about spectators. With regard to performers, we must know what informs a spectator that certain features of the performers are characteristics of or facts about one of the objects of the performance–traits of a character, for example–and that other features are not. This is no mean feat. In an entertaining and widely used book on script analysis, David Ball notes there is usually a good deal more information about characters in novels and people in real life than there is about characters in scripts. "In fact," he writes, "you probably know more about most acquaintances than *anyone* knows about Hamlet."[13] Characters, he reminds us, are "minimally extant in scripts, skeletal accumulations of carefully selected traits . . . because the nature of any stage character is heavily determined by the actor in the part."[14] This means that a significantly greater number of the features of a performer will also be characteristics of or facts about a character in the performed story than are referred to in the script on which the performance is based. Spectators notice a good many of a performer's

features, and they are supposed to. So Ball's observation puts pressure on us to be generous in considering which performer features are character features.

But consider the question, "Does Hamlet have blue eyes?" Surely, many performers who have played Hamlet have had blue eyes and many others have not. For each performer playing Hamlet, there is a determinate answer[15] to the question, does she or he have blue eyes? But, unless and until a performance makes something of the question with respect to Hamlet, the question of Hamlet's eye color does not have a determinate answer. And, when it does, it has an answer only relative to a particular performance or production. The point is that the number of features of any given performer who plays Hamlet is far greater than the number of features that enable a performer to fit the description, "playing Hamlet." Many of a performer's features go unnoticed, and they are supposed to. These considerations put pressure on us to be fairly cautious in considering which performers' features are characteristics of characters.

Given these opposing pressures, we might think audiences would have a lot of difficulty figuring out what features of the performers to attend to in order to grasp the characteristics of the characters. But they do not. So what is needed is some principled account of what individual spectators do that explains how these matters are managed.

The problem about spectators is that each spectator brings a different context and history to any given performance. A spectator may share some aspects of her background with all other spectators. They may all recognize they are at a theatrical performance. If one of them knows they are attending an off-Broadway production, probably they all know this. But they may not share other aspects of their backgrounds even with respect to theatre: the kinds of theatre one has seen could be quite different from and independent of the kinds another has seen; one may have seen a lot of performances by this company and they may be familiar to her, while another may be seeing one of their performances for the first time. Moreover, there are likely to be some aspects of one spectator's background that no other spectator will bring to the performance: one may have just taken a very difficult trip and be mentally exhausted; another may be preoccupied with her late husband's suicide. So, we may think, their experiences are so different they cannot have understood the play in the same way.[16] Yet, according to a reasonable principle of "cognitive uniformity," if there is to be genuine understanding by any one of them, then what is understood by one spectator must be understandable by most others.[17]

Consider then a character in a play who has an eager thirst. I propose this:

> Spectator S understands, when presented feature *f* of performer J, that C has an eager thirst" is true just in case, for some spectator S, some performer J, and some character C

(1) S responds to feature *f* as salient, under conditions of common knowledge that spectators are attending a theatrical performance, for a fact or set of facts that would lead one to conclude that C has an eager thirst or that will be recognized as inconsistent with alternatives to C's having an eager thirst,[18]
(2) S concludes that C has an eager thirst,
(3) feature *f* is salient for C's having an eager thirst.

The account of feature saliency relied on here is dependent upon the notion of salience employed in game-theoretical analyses of rational choice in coordination problems. In those analyses, a feature is said to stand out from others when there is a trigger that is not specific to the feature itself or the problem itself that makes the feature stand out. Instead, the trigger is determined by contextual elements.

Two people are talking on the phone when they are suddenly cut off. They cannot communicate with each other and yet both want to continue the conversation. Moreover each knows the other wishes the same. How are they to re-establish contact? Each has the option of either calling the other or waiting. For them to succeed in re-establishing contact, clearly one must wait and the other must call; but there is no feature of their situation that would tell either of them who should call and who should wait.

In "one-off" situations, like this variant of David Lewis's "telephone game,"[19] where the "game" is only played once, there simply is nothing either of these people knows about the situation or each other that prompts them towards choosing a strategy to employ. If they knew more about each other, perhaps, they might know how the other would reason. But they do not. So there is no solution.

Lewis recognized that people do solve many coordination problems in everyday life and that, therefore, in many situations there must be some features that do "stand out" for all the participants in virtue of which they make their choices. He also realized that what made those features stand out is *external* to the terms of the coordination problem itself. To illustrate this, change the telephone game as follows. First Person knows that Second Person has a white telephone and that Second Person knows that he himself has a black telephone. First Person and Second Person are inveterate chess players and each knows this about the other. Since white always goes first in chess, First Person reasons he should wait for Second Person's call and reasons that Second Person will reason in the same way.

Note that a tendency to notice a feature is salient can be thought of as "non-rational" when there is no reason, *related to what is being coordinated*, for preferring one choice to another.[20] Thus, a feature is salient to an individual as a result of *non-rational* tendencies to notice some features and to choose strategies because those features are present.[21] But this does not mean that no one is doing any reasoning. Indeed, in finding a feature salient, each party is making a guess as

to what feature others will respond to, and reasoning from that to the conclusion that the same feature will stand out for the others and that they too will reason as he is reasoning: and thence reasoning to a conclusion about how to act.

In these kinds of situations, referred to as "standard" coordination problems,[22] people are analyzed as "players" engaged in determining courses of action that will have the optimal "payoff." There is symmetry between the players, both in respect of what they are trying to do–namely, the same thing–and in respect of what they know about each other. So some aspects of standard coordination problems are different from the situation of spectators in relation to a performance. In this regard, I follow Robert Sugden who modifies this model for use in analyzing situations of discovery. As a result I will not use the term "players" and take the people involved to be seeking certain "payoffs." Instead I suggest we think of spectators as "*learners*"[23] seeking to acquire *an ability*, the ability to describe the object developed in the performance.

The situation of spectators of performances is very like that of players in standard coordination problems in most other respects.

> Features of a performer are salient to a spectator for a fact or set of facts just when the learner-spectator, under a suitable common knowledge requirement, can notice those features as regularities in the behavior of the performer and when the learner-spectator concludes (a) that some pattern–and hence some set of facts–obtains, (b) that whenever those features appear in the same context then the same set of facts obtains, *and* (c) that every other learner-spectator will conclude both (a) and (b).

As in standard coordination problems, conditions (a) and (b) specify that a feature is salient if it is thought to guide responses, if it is seen as *projectible*. And, just as in standard coordination problems, condition (c) specifies that a feature is salient if it stands out as projectible *for a population*.

Clearly, a great deal of weight must be carried by the "common knowledge" clause. Whether the view works out is dependent on whether spectators can actually know enough to guarantee at least roughly the same features will be picked out and on whether it is reasonable to expect that spectators will usually know that much information about each other. Four bits of knowledge suggest themselves.

First, if one spectator knows she is at the theatre, probably they all, or at least most of them, do so as well. Second, one of the aims of spectators of theatrical performances is to understand the performance that they see. Each spectator also knows that whatever she says when discussing a performance with others will not be counted as demonstrating understanding if it does not agree in the main with the characteristics others are discussing. So there will be conservative social

pressure both to look for and respond to the same features that others are likely to find salient and to track precisely those in developing the description of the content of the performance.[24]

A third fact is that spectators' physical reactions are "catching." When one laughs, for example, others tend to do as well. Laughter is often said to be "contagious." Anne Ubersfeld makes this and related observations the basis of a detailed analysis of spectator pleasures.[25] And, of course, laughter is but one of many involuntary or nearly involuntary responses that are contagious.

A fourth and crucial fact it this: spectators go to theatrical performances expecting performers to present them with an ordered sequence of materials to grasp. They are rarely disappointed in that particular regard. When they are disappointed, spectators are apt to feel more keenly the conservative social pressure to figure things out as others are.

Thus, the common knowledge requirement may be stated as follows.

> Spectators know they are at theatrical performances; and, in knowing that she is at a theatrical performance, each spectator also has knowledge of the interests of her fellow spectators and of their felt reactions, as well as of the fact that each expects something will be put forward for all of them to gain.

This conception of common knowledge is satisfactory for the purposes of guaranteeing it is a reasonable expectation that spectators will converge on roughly the same features as salient for roughly the same patterns. First, this knowledge is not beyond the reach of what spectators can expect to know of each other. It is social knowledge that all spectators normally share. In particular, this kind of knowledge can be obtained without any spectator having access to others' otherwise quite disparate backgrounds concerning what they bring idiosyncratically to the performance.

Second, this knowledge is all that spectators need by way of common knowledge of each other's perspective. This is because knowing she is attending a theatrical performance includes knowing that performers are going to present something to understand and in a way that makes it (not always easily) accessible to the spectator. Because spectators know this about performers they anticipate attending to the performers in order to get what the performers have arranged for them to observe. They watch for what the performers do to enable them to get that object. And performers do present things for spectators to attend to in order that spectators might observe the object the performers develop over the course of the performance. Spectators do not know in advance *what* they will find. But, crucially, they know that everyone else will be looking *for the same things*. Thus, while spectators are not guaranteed of finding the exactly and all the same things salient,

the common knowledge requirement proposed here guarantees the possibility, indeed the likelihood, they will find roughly the same set of features salient.

A further benefit of the feature-salience model for spectator convergence on features of performers is that it can easily be generalized to cover non-narrative performances. All that is required is to substitute terms for the relevant kinds of objects– "images" for "events," for example–and the same structure applies throughout. So narrative theatrical performances do not have a privileged place in generating the theoretical structure.

IV. How spectators identify and re-identify the objects presented to them in performances

Spectators demonstrate they have basic comprehension of a theatrical performance by describing the object that was developed in the performance. For example, if the performance is structured narratively, the object of that performance will be a story. When they describe or tell a story, they can be characterized as having been "thinking about" the objects of the story–its characters, events, and other objects such as skulls, hats, tables, books, pistols, and the like–and of the story itself, the object developed in the performance.[26]

To have thoughts about characters and events in plays spectators must be able to identify characters when they appear and events when they happen and then to re-identify characters when they appear again.[27] And spectators appear to do just that.

If Hedda Gabler appears in one performance of a traditional production using Ibsen's script for *Hedda Gabler*, spectators expect to see her again in other performances in the same production. If spectators have seen one performance of that kind, they have no difficulty re-identifying Hedda if she subsequently appears in performances of the same general kind yet very different productions from the one in which they first saw her. The first may have been a production with naturalistic setting, costumes and props; the next with almost no props, no set, no period costumes; and a third might have naturalistic production values, but be set in a swimming pool outside a Malibu beachfront house with swimwear for costumes, and pool toys for props.[28] It does not matter in which order a spectator encounters such a performance. The ability to identify and re-identify characters–and all other objects as well–survives changes in performances within productions, changes in productions, changes in settings, and changes in performers as well.

Once introduced to a character, or to any other object of the content of a narrative performance, most spectators have no trouble re-identifying that object even in radically different kinds of narrative performances. If spectators first see Hedda in *Gabler at a Distance*, most will have little trouble re-identifying Hedda in traditional performances or even in performances like *Spontaneous Beauty*.

And, again, the order of encounters does not seem to matter. The ability to identify and re-identify objects of narrative theatrical performances survives even radical changes in the kind of narrative performance employing those objects.

Imagine what appears to be a traditional style of performance, using much of Ibsen's script for *Hedda Gabler*, but telling a story in which what had been supporting characters, such as Lovborg, Aunt Juliane, and Tesman, are now the performance's major characters, and their situation is the focus of the story.[29] The company might be exploring the idea we have limited knowledge of where we come from and too little time to figure life out before we die. Or they might be exploring themes suggested by Elinor Fuchs's discussion of the Nietzschean conflict between Tesman and Lovborg.[30] The point is that, were Hedda to appear in this play, as Hamlet does in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*, spectators familiar with any of the productions described in the previous paragraphs would still recognize her as Hedda. Once again, the order of the encounter does not seem to matter. The ability to identify and re-identify objects of narrative theatrical performances survives even some changes in the roles of the objects where those changes are due to changes in the story.

Characters are not the only objects in a story that get identified across performances by spectators. Andrew Sofer remarks that

> The stage life of props extends beyond their journey within a given play. As they move from play to play and from period to period, objects accrue intertextual resonance as the absorb and embody the theatrical past.[31]

As Sofer's case studies show, props have a variety of functions, some of which they can only play if they are objects recognized across performances.[32]

In sum, the ability to identify and re-identify characters–and all other objects as well–survives changes in performances within productions, changes in productions, changes in settings, and changes in performers. The ability to identify and re-identify objects in plays survives even radical changes in the kind of narrative performance employing those objects. The ability to identify and re-identify objects in plays survives even some changes in the role of the objects where those changes are due to changes in the narrative.

We should want an explanation for these facts. What underwrites our capacity to identify and re-identify the elements of the content of performances? I suggest we begin by examining how it is spectators identify and re-identify these objects in very familiar cases. Accordingly, I will focus on identification of characters and ask how it is that spectators identify Hedda in any traditional performance using Ibsen's script for *Hedda Gabler*.

IV.a. Initial identification of characters and other objects in narrative performances

We might try this: spectators first develop lists of characteristics from what they see when they find certain features salient, projectible, and attempt to locate the object that is the bearer of those characteristics or properties. This "list view" holds that possession of correct descriptions–consisting of correct lists of characteristics–is sufficient for identification of the thing possessing the characteristics. But the list view has things the wrong way round. A spectator may not realize she is in possession of a correct description until she recognizes, or fails to recognize, the thing in question. Suppose a company has chosen to craft a short theatre piece using only and most of the language of Ibsen's script, right up to the point in the script where, in a traditional narrative performance, one character says, "Good Morning Hedda dear," and audiences looking, see her. But this is not a traditional narrative performance; rather it is performed as a spoken "choral" work including some contrapuntal part-work for five voices, and employing abstract movements based in the rhythms of the language uttered. The language of this piece is no less informative about Hedda's characteristics than is the language of a narrative performance. Indeed the second performance might even aim at bringing out precisely these same characteristics and to reach a kind of climax at the last words of the piece, "Good Morning Hedda dear."

But the features of performers that the spectators of the short choral piece find salient for characteristics of Hedda do not enable them to identify anyone who is Hedda. And that is because no individual (or even group of them) *appears* who could be identified as *her*. We must have a particular someone in mind in order to ascribe those characteristics to someone, and having someone or something in mind requires already having identified her or it. So having in mind a correct list of characteristics is not sufficient for having identified Hedda.

What else is needed?

In the opening act of a performance of a *Hedda Gabler*, spectators are provided a good deal of information of various kinds about Hedda. After some time, spectators then see a figure arrive from or at a particular space before them. Or perhaps they hear utterances before they see anything, but these utterances come from some particular location in the space. Most spectators react physically to these movements or sounds. By these means, spectators are prepared to locate something or someone on which to hang the characteristics they have in mind; and, then, most spectators do identify someone as *that one* there. There is a spatial element in identification. It is by thinking about that one *there* that audiences are able to think about *that one* and ascribe characteristics they already have in mind to a particular individual. What happens in this case is consistent with what is

called "demonstrative identification" first explored by Bertrand Russell and later developed by Gareth Evans.[33]

Demonstrative identification necessarily involves location of the object in egocentric space. That is, to pick out something in the environment in the relevant way is to react to its location, as given by the senses, relative to oneself. This does not require *believing* something like "Oh, something is over there;" for one's *reaction* to a thing's position is often nothing more than the turning one's head or leaning one's body in the direction of some sound or movement, without any thought at all. It may not even be necessary that one be conscious in order to be disposed in this way.[34] The disposition to physical movement in reaction to the sensed place of things is what is central to the capacity to locate them in egocentric space.[35]

But it is not enough be able locate something in egocentric space, for this gets us at most a sense of "here," of "there," and perhaps "here and *then* there." What more is required[36] in most circumstances is that we impose our knowledge of some non-egocentric space in which things happen on our egocentric space or, to put it the other way round, to locate our egocentric space within the framework of non-egocentric space. In everyday life, the relevant non-egocentric space is the public space of which we form cognitive maps, that is, the objective spatial relations among things. What non-egocentric space is in theatrical performance requires more detailed discussion (see Section V below).

The point to notice here is that theatre spectators frequently locate characters in egocentric space *without prior lists* of any characteristics in mind. This happens at the beginning of very nearly every narrative theatrical performance. Spectators may have no prior knowledge of the characters and events in the story–they may not even know it will *be* a narrative performance–and they still locate the things that are characters in the first moments of a performance. This fact highlights the point, already mentioned, that identification is largely a matter of responding behaviorally to the locations of sounds and movements of those characters. And it strongly suggests that identification of the elements of a theatrical performance involves the same kind of demonstrative identification that goes on in everyday life, and that demonstrative identification in theatre also grounds our capacities to have descriptive thoughts about characters and other objects so that our descriptors are thoughts about *those* things.

Three requirements are critical to our ability to attach descriptive thoughts to what is demonstratively identified. The first is that there must be some object that is identified; the second is that a subject must be able to track the same object through some substantial period of time;[37] and the third is that this ability to track over time must allow for changes in the positions, for movements, of both subject and object.[38]

It cannot be stressed enough that, read realistically,[39] the first requirement may be taken to *exclude* our ability to demonstratively identify characters and

events in narrative performances and, so, to attach descriptive thoughts to them. But a realist reading of the first requirement is presumptive: we have no basis for introducing metaphysical concerns at this point. As regards the phenomenology of our perception of characters and events and the relation of that phenomenology to the epistemological analysis we connect with it, it appears so far that we just do demonstratively identify characters and events in performances. And it appears we use the same mechanisms to learn who characters are and what they are doing that we use regarding any other objects and agents in the world. So, I read the first requirement as a description of our experience rather than as a metaphysical commitment. Taken as a reflection of our experience with these matters, therefore, the first requirement is satisfied. It is Hedda audiences are learning about, including the fact *her* name is "Hedda."[40] The second and third requirements are likewise satisfied: once spectators have identified Hedda demonstratively, they track her during the time she is there and in the space where they first noticed her, now noting additional characteristics the performers make salient for them.

IV.b. Re-identification of characters and other objects in narrative performances

In the first act of the performance *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda is engaged in conversations with Tesman, Aunt Juliane, and Mrs. Elvsted. Spectators learn a good deal more about her in these conversations, and again much of what they learn comes by way of information presented in the form or Hedda's reactions to others and their reactions to her. At the appearance of Judge Brack, Hedda leaves to show Mrs. Elvsted out, then returns to finish a conversation with Tesman and Judge Brack. Upon her return, no spectator would be surprised to hear Judge Brack address her as "Mrs. Tesman." For it is the same character who left only moments before who has returned. But how do audiences know *this* figure is still Hedda?

The answer lies in the fact spectators take that one *there* to be the same character that *only moments before* had left and who now has returned. That is, her location in space is linked to *the time* it takes for her to leave and come back. A figure appears and, to all appearances, is Hedda; but what actually underwrites a spectator's re-identification of Hedda is that her *appearance is distinctive enough, in the spatio-temporal setting of the performance,* to allow the spectators to locate her in egocentric space as the object of their continued thought. They are still thinking about *her*, *this one*, because they know the spatio-temporal setting of the performance has not changed. And they also know that because they know *they* have not moved. They have thereby established a relevant "area of search."

Appeal to spectators' knowledge of their own spatio-temporal situations supports identification and re-identification within single performances. Spectators' knowledge of where they have been undergirds estimates of how long a character

has been gone. And this works within a single performance of traditional duration because the time any character is out of sight and not tracked is relatively short.

But it is not obvious why such an appeal should work to support re-identification across performances, productions, performance kinds, changes in stories and so on. When there has been a substantial gap in time or place since the original sighting, it is implausible to think any spectator has been tracking any character's location. There is no plausible area of search that depends on the kinds of estimates that work within single performances. Spectators may not even know, in the relevant sense, where *they* have been in the meantime.[41]

V. The special nature of theatrical uses of ordinary physical space

There are three ways to orient yourself that add up to subsuming egocentric space to non-egocentric space. First, in most everyday circumstances the relevant non-egocentric space is simply the *public space* defined by our cognitive maps of the objective spatial relations among things. This can be thought of in two ways. Each corresponds to a way that people have a grasp of those objective spatial relations. Each can be illustrated by a way in which you might give directions. The first is by reference to compass points or street addresses: "from here you go north five blocks and turn west onto Laramie Street, and the address is 1702 Laramie Street." The second is by specifying a route: "from hear you go along side that long aluminum fence until it ends and then you turn left just before the big Lutheran Church; the bar is just ahead on your right; look for the big red dog on the roof of a building and it is just past that." We rely on knowing where we are in identifying objects (in this case, the bar) by reference to egocentric space subsumed under our cognitive map of public space in one of these two ways.

Second, in some circumstances the time and distance lapse may be so large you cannot say with precision where you have been in the interval. In these kinds of circumstances, you rely more heavily on familiarity with lists of characteristics. Even so, you still do so in relation to *remembered spatial location*, as when you are trying to determine if the route you are following is the correct route to your friend's house in a city you have not visited in some years. In such circumstances you confirm that a given route is a route you have been down before because it prompts you to remember features, or you reject a given route as in fact not familiar because if fails to prompt you to remember features or the features it has are too dissimilar to secure recognition.

A third kind of circumstance involves a distinction among *kinds of spaces* or locations. And you appeal to the kind of locations you are in when recognition occurs independently of your knowledge of where you have been in an interval, no matter how long. For example, you are capable of recognizing your own radio in your own home even if there are thousands that look just like it somewhere and even if you

have not been home for some time. In contrast, there are some location kinds that disable recognitional capacities. If your radio appeared in "the police display of stolen goods," to use one of Evans's examples, it is unlikely you will be able to tell your own radio from any others in the universe. In this kind of location, having lost track of where the radio has been, and having no coherent story to tell about where you have been that would support a claim about the relevant area of search, you are unable to employ the techniques you have ready to hand in the other cases.[42] An important, even if completely obvious, aspect of this kind of circumstance is this: knowledge of the kinds of spaces that enable recognition is *a posteriori* knowledge, it is not something one comes to know without some experience.

Any adequate definition of "performance space" should both encompass but also allow us to distinguish among dance and theatrical performances, spectator sports, company picnics, and religious rituals.[43] To meet this desideratum, a definition must entail that performance spaces are particular uses of literal space; for all of these kinds of performances just do take place at specific physical locations. Accordingly, I follow out a line of thought suggested by Augusto Boal, Peter Brook, and Hollis Huston, and propose we define *performance space* as follows.[44]

> Broadly speaking, a "performance space" is an active observation space (a) that is created in literal space by the actions of some people who, by those actions, not only become either performers or spectators but also turn other people into either spectators or performers and (b) in which whatever spectators observe is observed in that literal space during the time those actions govern the behavior of the parties involved.

This definition does not pick out anything distinctive about *theatrical* space; but it does allow room to think of theatrical space as a species of performance space, more generally. The fact something is a theatre space only if it is a species of performance space, involving the creation of active observation space, does not entail there is anything of particular value in live performance that cannot be found in other forms of performance. There may be some value added by liveness; but that is not certain,[45] and it plays no factor in the issues we are discussing here.

What is important is that the fact something is a performance space if and only if it involves the creation of an active observation space entails that performance spaces, including theatrical spaces, are kinds of places exactly analogous to other non-egocentric space kinds–i.e., uses of literal space–such as "homes," "police displays," and "playing fields," under which a spectator's egocentric space can be subsumed. This fact ensures that performance spaces play the right kind of roles–as relevant areas of search–for underwriting the recognition of characters in the challenging cross-performance cases. Such spaces will be non-egocentric

in the right way because they will be determined relative not to where spectators know they have been, but relative to their knowledge of the kind of place they were in when the original sightings took place. So it is that, because spectators originally identified Hedda in a theatre space, they are able to recognize *her* again when watching a new theatrical performance of whatever kind in a relevantly similar use of space.

This approach brings out sharply why the list view cannot be the right fundamental story. For, were you reminded of Hedda Gabler by someone you encountered *in the street*, you would not think you had recognized Hedda. And no amount of subsequent, new, and confirming characteristics evident in this person's behavior would convince you otherwise. We understand that a street is simply *the wrong kind of space* in which to meet Hedda. Just as the locale of the police display of stolen goods typically disables your ability to recognize your own radio, a street is the kind of place that typically disables recognition of theatrical characters.

To be sure, before you learn how to assess which non-egocentric spaces underwrite which re-identifications, it is completely open to you to suppose, for example, that you can identify your radio in the police display of stolen goods. You have to learn that this is a non-egocentric space in which, no matter that you can subsume egocentric space to it, you are still unable to pick out that radio which is the one you have encountered before, namely, yours. Correspondingly, if you have learned that the space in which you originally saw Hedda is a theatre space, then you have a grip on the kind of space that is involved in re-identifications. And even if there are cases that are problematic in this regard, in most cases you have no expectation of recognizing Hedda again except in that *kind* of space, that is, in ordinary space used in *that kind* of way.[46]

This approach also brings out in sharp relief that the idea of a special kind of space–where that is understood as "semic" or "fictive" or not otherwise identical to the literal ordinary space used in a certain recognizable way–is simply not plausible as a candidate for delivering an area of search that a spectator relies upon in determining which object she is thinking about. For there is no literal route for a spectator to trace in determining the relevant area of search if one of the spaces she has to know how to get to is not a literal space. Re-identification of those same props, images, actions, and individuals across performances is based upon a non-metaphorical appreciation of the fact the original sightings in which observation relationships were set up were in ordinary, literal space.

So here I appeal to an economy of thought. Theatre space is what works as the non-egocentric kind of space to which spectator-subjects subsume their egocentric locations when demonstratively identifying who or what it is they are thinking about in all cases: cases of fictional narrative performances, of non-fictional narrative performances, and of non-narrative theatrical performances. The explanation is general, serving all identification and recognition.

VI. Some benefits of the accounts defended in this essay

Individually and taken together, these accounts point out how to explain several phenomena that are of deep and abiding interest to theatre theorists. They do so, moreover, without running afoul of the problems besetting semiotic and phenomenological theories of theatre.

VI.a. Double-focus and slippage

You go to the theatre to watch a performance called "Hedda Gabler," a narrative theatrical performance of a quite familiar kind. As you watch the first scenes unfold, you find yourself waiting for the appearance of the title character. When she does appear, however, you are immediately troubled. You have been led by the interchanges among the other characters already on view to specific expectations concerning many of Hedda's characteristics. You are not entirely disappointed: for example, her physical demeanor *is* imperious. But, as soon as she opens her mouth to speak, you are shocked. You cannot take your eyes off the gap caused by her two missing front-teeth. The lisp caused by the gap grates upon your ears. After some time you conclude that what shocked you are features only of the performer and are not characteristics of Hedda.[47] After more time you may even forget about it. Or you may still find yourself noticing these features of the performer from time to time, but they may only be as occasional distractions from the unfolding narrative of the play.

Features of performers are just anything about a performer to which a person's attention could be drawn. This may include what she is wearing, the mole on her neck, the flat twang in her voice, the lift of an eyebrow, the droop of a shoulder, her crooked-back posture, her blue eyeliner. Any regularly recurring feature could be considered separately and, hence, focused on for itself. Let us refer to the sense many spectators can get, of having their attention drawn *both* to characteristics of the object being developed in the performance *and* to features of the performers, as the sense of "double focus." Let us further refer to the sense spectators can get, of finding their attention going back and forth between these, as the sense of "slippage."[48]

The phenomena of double focus and of slippage are consistent with and predictable on the feature-salience model for explaining convergence on features of performers that are projectible as characteristics of the objects of performance. These are predictable effects because the salience model relies explicitly on the fact spectators attend to performers' voices and bodies. In adopting the model, we have sought to explain which features are connected to characteristics of the object performed and which are not, given that there are many more features of

a performer that spectators might attend to than performers plan to have noticed when developing and executing a performance.

The bodies and voices of performers are notoriously distracting.[49] In attending to a performer a spectator may find herself uncommonly focused on his unusual hands. Accordingly, she may lose track of the performance. But she may, instead, observe how the events in the play are reflected in the movements and the stillnesses of those hands. Or she may not be aware of the direction of her attention, yet still track the developing object. Another spectator may be attending only and exactly to whatever regularly occurring features the performers had planned to be noticed and tracked by an audience.

The fact that double-focus and slippage are predictable on the feature-salience model allows us to use it to first clarify two significant phenomena.

One of these is "performer power," a group of phenomena that has attracted considerable attention in the philosophical and theatre studies literatures. One such phenomenon is an effect that Aaron Meskin and Jonathan Weinberg, following Stanley Cavell,[50] call "star power." Star power, as Weinberg and Meskin describe it, is the effect that occurs when a "film star's identity as star carries significant weight, perhaps even more than the weight of the character he or she is portraying in any given film." Meskin and Weinberg refer to this effect as "psychological doubleness" and assert it "is no mere side-effect or cognitive quirk . . . [because] filmmakers count on it and exploit it."[51]

Another "performer power" phenomenon is an effect that Marvin Carlson calls "the 'ghosting' of previous roles in [the] reception of later ones."[52] This effect is part of "the normal theatre experience . . . with an actor in previous roles," and is analyzed by Carlson as delivering "an aura of expectations based on past roles."[53]

Performer power is a wider phenomenon than either star power or the social fact and aura of celebrity. It is wider because it applies both to filmic and to theatrical performances. It is also wider because it is an effect exploited by many performers who are not stars and not familiar to spectators from past performances either. But it is, as Meskin and Weinberg assert, no mere side-effect of filmic and theatrical performance.

Performer power is to be anticipated on the feature-salience model. A performer in a play relies on the fact spectators will pay attention to her features in order to gain information about the character she is playing. Her features may be compelling because she is a star, or because she is familiar from past theatrical encounters, or only because she is striking in appearance or behavior. If her features are compelling, for whatever reason, then in some performance practices she would be wise to exploit spectator interest in *her* features in order to prime the feature-salience pump.

A contrasting phenomenon to performer power is "character power," which is the familiar fact that some performances are so striking that even those who

know better attribute characteristics of a character to the performer. And again, this phenomenon is to be expected on the feature-salience model. For, in any performance, some of the characteristics of a character simply *are* identical to features of the performer. Moreover, the idea of what it is to "know better" is explicable on the account we have adopted of the identification and re-identification of the objects of performance. Character power involves mistakes in re-identification that take place when spectators encounter performers outside the theatre. There are two questions to answer. First, why don't we anticipate seeing Hedda in the shopping mall next week? And second, why don't we usually see Hedda in the shopping mall? The answer to the former cannot be the same as the answer to the latter because on occasion we are indeed tempted to think we see Hedda in the mall, after all. And here is the sense of that: until an individual spectator learns that the theatre space is the kind of space in which she can reliably identify and distinguish among certain individuals and that the shopping mall is not a relevant area of search for those individuals, a spectator might well expect the figure she picks out in the mall to have the characteristics of a character she has seen in a recent performance. Once she has the relevant knowledge, she is far less likely to make those mistakes.

VI.b. Issues about the materiality of the means of performance

The fact that double-focus and slippage are predictable on the feature-salience model can also shed light on two theoretical matters having to do with the materiality of the features presented to audiences, especially issues about the materiality of the performer's body.

First, the materiality of the actor's body has become a dominant theme in modernist drama and in theories of theatrical modernism. In a widely quoted remark Herbert Blau claims that "of all the performing arts, the theatre stinks most of mortality."[54] Hollis Huston denies there is much else possible in theatre but the persistent "gap…between the [material] performance and the thought performed."[55] And Stanton Garner defines the modernist aesthetic for theatre this way: "to make the stage not simply stand in for reality but to become it."[56]

The feature-salience model for basic comprehension describes and explains the fact that lies behind discussions of this aspect of the modernist movement in theatre. If spectators get the characteristics they grasp by attending to the features of performers, there is no reason that fact cannot become a theme of a movement in the history of theatre. And if the movement is one that focuses upon the means by which the art form achieves its effects, as modernism is sometimes said to be, then it will be no surprise to find the fact of the performer's body figuring large in the themes and practices of the movement.

The second, and related, issue is that, ever since modernist theatre practice and theory began to focus upon it, the materiality of performers and of other means of performance has come to be seen as a crucial point of division between semiotic and phenomenological theories of theatre. According to some, the materiality of the actor's body marks the limit of what can be analyzed in terms of semiotics, in terms of signs and meanings. For, in some performances, bodies seem not to mean something (else) but to *be* something (i.e., themselves).[57] Treating material things, such as props, as "signs" not only makes it difficult to say what *is* and what is *not* a material object it also renders the pleasure to be found in them *qua* material objects inexplicable.[58] According to others, the materiality of the performer's body, while challenging to semiotic analysis, is not a fact a more sophisticated semiotic theory cannot handle. So we should adopt a semiological approach because nothing can be (just) itself once it is on the stage, which is a site of producing meanings.[59] A standard argument for this view is that, since anything can go as a prop for anything else in a theatrical performance, then anything must act as a "sign" when it appears in a performance.[60]

The feature-salience model provides clarification here in two ways. First, while it is probably impossible for all the features of a given object to be found salient by some population of spectators for all of its own actual characteristics, this does not entail that no features of an object can be found salient for some characteristics of the object itself on some occasion. For stylistic reasons, a company could seek to call attention to the fact they have been using plastic toys for pistols in their performance. They will do this by enabling spectators to focus on certain of the features of their props–those features that are projectible for *some of* the very same characteristics that the object happens to have. Second, when we ask what features of a performer, a bit of the set or stage, or a property are projectible for some pattern or characteristics of some characteristic in the performed object–of an agent, of a room, of a pistol–there is no *essential* on-principle restriction on what those characteristics could be. Whatever restrictions there may be are set by styles of performance.

In the end, therefore, this is not an issue about objects on stage being signs and meanings and, so, becoming unable to be themselves. Nor is it about the limits to what can be a sign on the grounds that a thing *is* just itself on stage in some performances. This is instead an issue about theatrical styles and the uses to which materials can be put. If there are limits to those uses, that will be a discovery emerging in the historical practices of theatre, not from its philosophy.

Of course what is gripping about this debate has to do with the fact that spectators get what they do by attending to performers, sets and props. And that can be uncanny in some performance styles. But surely not in all. This is not, for example, a matter of real things breaking through the illusion common to all performances, as Bert States holds.[61] But the reason theatrical performance does

not significantly involve illusions about performers' bodies has nothing to do with bodies being "signs," as Anne Ubersfeld holds.[62] The feature-salience explanation of basic understanding requires common knowledge among spectators that they are at a theatrical performance. And it is impossible to possess the knowledge required to explain spectator convergence on the same features and characteristics–the knowledge one is in a theatre with others–and simultaneously to enter into an illusion that one is not.[63]

VI.c. Issues about "presence"

An added benefit of the analysis of identification and re-identification of the objects of a theatrical performance I have just provided is that it enables us to make more precise the feeling people have of "being in the presence of" characters and other objects of theatrical performance,[64] but without being committed to a spurious "metaphysics of presence."

In an unproblematic sense of "presence," if I am in your presence, then (a) I could see or hear you if I looked in your direction or turned my head towards the sounds you are making, (b) there would be some place quite nearby to which you could go such that I could not see or hear you even if I looked or turned in your direction, and (c) there is someplace quite nearby that I could go such that I could not see or hear you even if I looked or turned in the relevant direction. This suggests the sense in which we are in the presence of characters when watching theatrical performances.

The physical notions that are involved in describing what it is to be in the presence of another are the same as those involved in descriptions of demonstrative and recognition-based identification of characters and other objects of theatrical performances. Both involve pre-cognitive reactions to sounds and sights that trigger an organism's directional responses. Both involve tracking an object in space over a stretch of time, the same kinds of loss of contact, and the same means of re-establishing contact.

Thus, this account allows us to explain why spectators are much less in the presence of characters and events when reading novels or works of dramatic literature. One thing we think is special about spectators' encounters with characters and events in plays is that, in some sense, spectators are in the presence of characters and events in a way that they are not in most other art forms capable of delivering narratives. No matter how close one may feel to a character in a novel, one is never in any doubt that she is not in that character's presence. On the accounts presented in this paper, that is simply because there never occur the kinds of physical reactions to characters that are possible, indeed crucial, in theatre. Similarly, even if a spectator reacts physically to movement (or apparent movement[65]) in movies, she is never in any doubt she is not in the presence of that movement. And this is because she

has no sense of tracking *this one* or *that one* through the physical space *that she also inhabits*. In this regard theatrical performance shares an important feature with dance performance.

This analysis of identification and re-identification of the objects of a theatrical performance requires that spectators learn that theatrical space is a use of *literal* space that underwrites areas of search within which spectators are able to recognize and identify characters and other objects they have previously identified. But that is just part of what it is to learn to go to the theatre. It does not entail a commitment to performance practices that seek to promote identification with characters or even with performers. Being in their presence, in the sense explained here, may be what makes such identification possible (if it does); but it certainly does not make it either inevitable or desirable.[66]

Notes

1. See, for a central example, Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996) 53-54, 126-127. I assume readers of this journal are familiar both with views of this kind and with the arguments concerning their respective drawbacks.

2. See, for a central example, Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992) 9, 96-101. Once again, I assume readers of this journal are familiar both with views of this kind and with the arguments concerning their respective drawbacks.

3. Michael Kirby, "Non-semiotic performance," *Modern Drama* 25.1 (1982) 105-111.

4. It is not so much a matter that these things are received sub-doxastically. For, as I will argue below, that fact about some item does not prevent it from being *understood*. It is, rather, that being an object of understanding does not render any item into a unit of meaning, a sign.

5. Parts of the analysis in this essay were first developed for a paper accepted for presentation at the *Third Mediterranean Conference in Aesthetics*, Tunis, Tunisia, June 2002, that, unfortunately I was unable to attend. The bulk of the essay spins out of material I have worked out in greater detail in James R. Hamilton, *The Art of Theatre,* New Directions in Aesthetics Series, ed. Dominic McIver Lopes and Berys Gaut (London: Blackwell, forthcoming in June, 2007). In the book, I argue for the notion of basic theatrical understanding assumed here, and I show in greater detail how the feature salience model presented here works in a completely general way for any performance kind.

6. Imagining idealized theatrical performances has two forms. The aims of the two practices are, however, different. The first form is the practice of "production analysis," which aims to imagine full-blown performances when it is no longer possible to attend any actual performance. The aim is "to clarify *possible meanings and effects*, primarily for readers, critics, and theatregoers" and the result "should be improved understanding of *the performance potentialities* of the play at issue." See Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays, 1675-1707* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989) 10. See also Andrew Sofer's discussion of this practice in Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2003) 3-6.

Philosophers, in contrast, use idealized cases in order to abstract those features of actual cases they think need explanation. Which aspects of a case needs explanation will depend on the question being asked. That is, given a well formed question about a group of actual cases, not every feature of each actual case will need to be explained, but only those relevant to the question. Accordingly, one way to disagree with a philosophical analysis, accordingly, is to argue that some features standing in need of explanation do not appear in the philosopher's idealized cases.

7. Two points are worth mentioning here. First, this list does not exhaust the possibilities. These are all more or less narrative in structure; and many kinds of performances are not. Second, I do not intend to imply that the latter three are not performances "of" Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. In *The Art of Theatre*, I argue that any of them could be–or, even more strongly, that no performances of any kind are–performances "of" a work by Ibsen, at least as that locution is usually understood in the text-based theatrical tradition, because the intentional locution, "performance of X," is systematically misleading.

8. I owe these cases to a conversation with Bruce Glymour who encouraged me to consider a wider range of cases and to answer this particular objection to the proposed success conditions.

9. But compare Paul Woodruff, "Understanding Theatre," *Philosophy and Art*, ed. Daniel Dahlstrom, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, 23 (Washington, D. C.: Catholic U of America P, 1991). Woodruff would not agree with the claim I make here. That is because he has a "thicker" conception of what it is to understand than I am employing here.

10. For an entertaining discussion of this phenomenon, see M. Frayn & D. Burke, *The Copenhagen Papers* (New York: Picador, 2001) 28-30.

11. Conditionals are sentences of the form if . . . then . . . , where what appears in the ellipses following "if" and "then" are claims. The "*if*"-clause is called the "antecedent" of the conditional, and the "*then*"-clause is called the conditional's "consequent." *Counterfactual* conditionals are conditionals, usually expressed in the subjunctive mood, that presuppose their antecedents are false. They assert that something would have been the case had something else been the case (with the explicit assumption that the latter was not, in fact, the case). Counterfactuals are thought to be useful in explaining how physical laws–sentences like "All copper conducts electricity"–differ from other generalizations that might happen to be true–for example, "Every object on my dining room table conducts electricity." The idea is that if anything were copper –which my pencil is not–it would conduct electricity, but not just anything would conduct electricity were it on my dining room table. Counterfactuals are also thought to be useful in explaining dispositional properties. Saying this lump of sugar is soluble in water just comes to this: it would dissolve, if it were in water (which it is not).

12. Woodruff claims that "understanding consists largely in having certain emotions" (Woodruff 13). I take the relatively less controversial and weaker ideas of "reactions" and "mood shifts" as evidence of understanding in part because and I wish to remain neutral about a cognitive theory of the emotions to which Woodruff is committed. In this way, his idea of understanding is "thicker" than what I am pushing here." Another reason is that I am concerned to ensure we keep the physical interactions between performers and audiences clearly in view. Emotion reactions surely are physical reactions to some extent. But it is easy to lose sight of this fact in many cognitivist theories of the emotions, and I believe we should not do so.

13. David Ball, *Backwards & Forwards* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983) 60-61.

14. 61.

15. I am relying on a distinction between "determinate answers" with "determinable answers." Some answers are determinate even if we cannot in fact determine what those answers are: whether Albert the Great of England weighed over 150 pounds is a question to which there is a determinate, but not a determinable, answer. In the case of many contemporary performances of Hamlet, we seem to have the opposite situation: the answer regarding Hamlet is determinable, but not determinate.

16. Paul Ziff makes a related point about both theatre and dance, especially regarding what can be taken in at any single auditing. Imagine, for instance, two people viewing the same performance but from different locations. In certain theatre arrangements the position from which two people see the performance can make for many differences in what these spectators will have presented to them. Paul Ziff, *Antiaesthetics* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1984) 87.

17. Woodruff spells out the cognitive uniformity principle in this way: "Whatever can be understood can be understood uniformly; any process that cannot be uniform in the required way is not understanding." What I claim here is a reasonable entailment of Woodruff's formulation of the principle (Woodruff 19-20).

18. The last clause is present to cover the non-discursive signs of performance as discussed in §2.

19. David Lewis, *Conventions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), first published (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1969) 5. I am not concerned with the defense by Lewis and others of a general account of conventions in which reference to intentions can be eliminated and linguistic behavior naturalized. The appeal of this work in the present context is motivated by its consistency with the goal of seeking to understand audience understanding first and then performer meaning when and if that is necessary and by the absence of reference to intentions in figuring out what conventions are in play in a given context of activity.

20. Seamus Miller, "Coordination, Salience and Rationality," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24.3 (1991) 362, sums up Lewis's view of the externality of salience in this way: "Agents have desires and aversions, modes of apprehending the world, histories, and exist in environments that impinge upon them. But in that case certain aspects of certain things are going to come to their attention, and others not, and some of these are going to strike them more forcefully than others. In short, some things are going to stand out; for any agents, including rational agents, some things are salient, others not."

21. Lewis 5-8.

22. Lewis 8-24 and 97-100, and Robert Sugden, "The Role of Inductive Reasoning in the Evolution of Conventions, *Law and Philosophy* 17 (1998) 380-381.

23. Sugden 388-395.

24. For more technical discussions of these issues, see Miller 359-370, Sugden 380-395, and Peter Vanderschraaf, "Convention as Correlated Equilibrium," *Erkenntnis* 42 (1995) 65-87. Miller has used similar arguments to defend the general rationality guarantee deriving from choice based on salient features alone. I am less concerned with the rationality issue *per se* than with the question whether the fact that theatre is a social institution gives us reason to suppose spectators will find pretty much the same features salient for roughly the same reasons and producing roughly the same outcomes.

25. Anne Ubersfeld, "The Pleasure of the Spectator," trans. Pierre Bouillaguet and Charles Jose, *Modern Drama* 25.1 (1982) 128.

26. Much of the work on this part of the essay was first done while I was the recipient of a two-week visit to Texas Tech University, in Fall 2004, while on a Big 12 Fellowship. I appreciate the discussions I had there with Aaron Meskin and Danny Nathan. I would also like to thank Doug Patterson, for pushing me to make the phenomenological character of this essay clearer, and Alberto Voltolini and Francesco Orilia for letting me read recent work in progress on the ontology of fictional agents and for making useful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

27. It is common among philosophers to subsume whatever we say about characters and events in theatrical performances of narrative fictions to a general theory of fictions. In the end, this may be the right direction to take for the purposes of metaphysics. But in terms of the epistemology of theatrical performances–of how we understand the objects of what is presented to spectators in a performance–this is clearly not an option. Many theatrical performances are not narratives at all, let alone fictional narratives. If we want a general account of how the contents of performances are perceived, starting with that particular and special subset of performances needs considerably more justification than is usually on offer. The main reason less justification is provided, I believe, is that the issues are usually taken to be metaphysical rather than epistemological.

28. This case is not entirely imagined: a film version of *Hedda Gabler* with a similar setting was released in November 2004, at the Seattle Film Festival. A stage version was developed in Seattle in 2000. I have transposed the setting to southern California from its native Washington.

29. The example is inspired by Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* (London: Faber, 1967).

30. Elinor Fuchs, "Counter-Stagings: Ibsen against the Grain," *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 52-66. Fuchs's essay provides a basis of what could be a compelling performance, with Tesman and Lovborg in Nietzschean conflict with Tesman as Apollonian and Lovborg as Dionysian, each writing a competing history of civilization (64-66).

31. Sofer is speaking here of props both as parts of the contents of performance and as elements used by performers in performances. But, as we will see later in the discussion of the materiality of performance elements, there is no on-principle barrier to Sofer's conflation of these (Sofer 2).

32. 20-29.

33. In thinking this through, I rely heavily on the work regarding demonstrative and recognition based identification developed by Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 143-191, 267-298. Evans develops this material in an exploration of Bertrand Russell's claim that, as Evans puts it, "a subject cannot make a judgment about something unless he knows which object his judgment is about" (Evans 89). Evans explores the idea that to assign predicates to a thing and assess the truth of the application, we must have what he calls "an Idea of the object," and he seeks to ground having an Idea of an object in having capacities to identify the thing demonstratively and recognitionally, without having to believe anything about the object to do so. The result is that Evans not only makes Russell's idea more precise, he also removes its unnecessary reference to knowledge or even belief content. Evans then builds a theory of varieties of reference on this largely, but re-worked, Russellian base. It is the base-level work that is of use in the present context. We can think of what follows as providing additional support for Evans's views on these matters even if Evans would not be entirely happy with my strictly epistemological application of that work.

34. The phenomena we are discussing resemble "flocking behavior" of birds, fish, and ourselves in a number of ways. But, in the case of human beings, it is especially important that flocking turns up in "cognitive and experiential variables" as well as in physical movements. James Kennedy and Russell Eberhart, "Partical Swarm Optimization," *IEEE* (1995) 1942-1948; here, quotation is from 1943.

35. "Egocentric space can exist," Evans argues, "only for an animal in which a complex network of connections exists between perceptual input and behavioral output" (Evans 154). Demonstrative identification is possible because we are the kinds of organisms that respond behaviorally to sensory

inputs of spatio-temporal objects *and* can subsume those dispositions to knowledge of the spatial environment.

36. I leave on one side any complications that might attend the added fact that we are concerned from this point on only with organisms that are conscious and capable of reasoning.

37. The idea that identification of characters and other objects in theatrical performances requires tracking in "continuous space" is a view familiar from Susan Sontag's "Theatre and Film," *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Strous, Giroux, 1966) 99-122, especially at 108-109. But I show that this tracking can admit of serious, even fairly lengthy, gaps in time.

38. Evans 173-176.

39. Evans intends a realist reading. He explicitly excludes the contents of hallucinations as capable of being identified demonstratively (Evans 173). Nevertheless, for the reasons I offer in the body, I think the introduction of metaphysical considerations here is premature.

40. We can now explain why nothing is identifiable as Hedda in the chorus-like performance described earlier, in which spectators gain only a list of characteristics of Hedda. Nothing physical appears in that performance to which spectators are drawn to attach those characteristics. There is no experience of *that one there* that prompts such attachment. Accordingly there is nothing *about which* they are having thoughts; so those spectators are, in thinking about a possible someone called "Hedda" are not thinking about *her*.

41. When a spectator has lost track of a character or when there has been a substantial gap in time or place since the original sighting, we seem to be in this situation: we can see how to show a spectator has identified *that one there*, but how do we show she has the *same character* in mind after some interval during which she has not kept track of the object? That one may be another character that looks just like the former character, or, worse, the character she once had in mind may have changed beyond recognition during the interval in which the spectator had not tracked her/him (Evans 272-273). Evans notes that this does indeed entail there are cases that are undecidable, but this does not undermine the capacity to recognize or the concept of the capacity of recognitional identification.

42. 280.

43. Paul Thom, *For* An *Audience* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993) 4-6. For a thorough discussion of three desiderata of any adequate specification of performance space, see James R. Hamilton, "Theatre," *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2nd edition, eds. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001) 585-596.

44. See Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the OPed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990), Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1995), and Hollis Huston, *The Actor's Instrument: Body, Theory, Stage* (Ann Arbor, U of Michigan P, 1992) 1-16, 68-89, and 111-126. There is another strategy, derivable from H. P. Grice's theory of communication. The reason I do not pursue that here is that the strategy fails to meet the second desideratum, for reasons discussed in Hamilton, "Theatre."

45. The claim that "liveness" confers a value to theatrical performance in contrast to movie and other "mediated" performances is rightly and decisively contested, I believe, in Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999) 38-43.

46. The case I have been making is conceptual. Some empirical evidence related to the process I have described, and its reliance on spectator's ability to recognize objects because the spaces they occupy constitute a familiar locale, can be found in Steven P. Tipper and Bruce Weaver, "The Medium of Attention: Location-Based, Object-Centred, or Scene-Based?" *Visual Attention*, ed. R. D. Wright (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 77-107.

47. It is imaginable, though perhaps not without considerable imaginative stretch, that this company had prepared a production in which Hedda must have such a gap and must lisp. They may even have required the performer doing this role to agree to tooth removal before rehearsals in order to secure the part. But you are given no reason to think this has happened here. At no time and in no manner, for example, do the other characters make something of Hedda's appearance and her manner of speaking.

48. I do not mean to suggest that double focus is the experience of having one's attention drawn to these things simultaneously. That may happen, but it is not crucial to anything I am investigating that this ever be so. It is enough that spectators commonly find themselves sometimes focusing on the performed object and sometimes focusing on the performers themselves.

49. See Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California Reprint Edition, 1985) for a detailed study of how performers' bodies in particular are at the root of common misgivings–moral and non-moral–about theatrical performers and performances.

50. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (New York, Viking Press, 1971).

51. Aaron Meskin and Jonathan Weinberg, "Imagine That!" *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics*

and the Philosophy of Art, ed. Matthew Kieran (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2005) 222-235.

52. Marvin Carlson, "Invisible Presences–Performance Intertextuality," *Theatre Research International* 19.2 (1994) 113.

53. 112, 113.

54. Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theatre and the Vanishing Point* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1982) 83.

55. Hollis Huston, *The Actor's Instrument: Body, Theory, Stage* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 45.

56. Stanton B. Garner, Jr., "Object, Objectivity, and the Phenomenal Body," *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994) 87-119.

57. Bert O. States, "Introduction," and "The World on Stage," *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: on the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P,1985) 1-15, 19-47, see especially 6-9 and 23-29.

58. Sofer shares States's worries about the refusal of semiotic analyses to acknowledge the phenomenological impact of material things in performances, especially props (Sofer 6-16, 18-19).

59. Eli Rozik, "The Corporeality of the Actor's Body: The Boundaries of Theatre and the Limitations of Semiotic Methodology," *Theatre Research International* 24.2 (1999) 198-211. See also Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," *The Drama Review: TDR* 21.1 (1977) 107-117, and Kier Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1980) 4-27.

60. Elam 11-14.

61. Bert O. States, "The World on Stage" and "The Scenic Illusion: Shakespeare and Naturalism," *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1985) 19-47 and 48-79, see especially 30-37 and 70-79.

62. Anne Ubersfeld, "Text-performance," trans. Frank Collins, *Reading Theatre,* eds. Paul Perron and Patrick Debbeche (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999) 3-31, see especially 24-26. (This is a translation of *Lire le theatre 1*, Editions Belin, 1996)

63. My analysis here is anticipated by an argument concerning this same point in James R. Hamilton, "'Illusion' and the Distrust of Theatre," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41.1 (1982) 39-50. In that essay I argued there could be no illusion because no one with the knowledge she is in a theatre can be taken in. Here I argue for the weaker claim that, for that same reason, illusion does not play a significant role in theatre's deliverances. I thank Dom Lopes for pointing out the argument for the stronger claim set forth in that article is unsound.

64. The idea itself is ubiquitous and important. See Marco De Marinis, "The Performance Text," *The Semiotics of Performance*, trans. Aine O'Healy, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993) 47-59; reprinted in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 232-251, especially 235, 242-244. See also Alice Rayner, "The Audience: Subjectivity, Community and the Ethics of Listening," *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 7.2 (1993) 9.

65. It is not clear that what is seen in movies is movement in space or only apparent movement. See Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) and Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) for a good introduction to the details of this discussion. In either case, there will be some similarity between theatre and movies insofar as movies are construed as a depictive art—so that the stage picture, moment to moment, plays a similar role in grasping a theatrical performance to that which it plays in grasping a movie.

66. For a useful presentation of this kind of critique, see Shannon Jackson, "Practice and Performance: Modernist Paradoxes and Literalist Legacies," *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 109–233.